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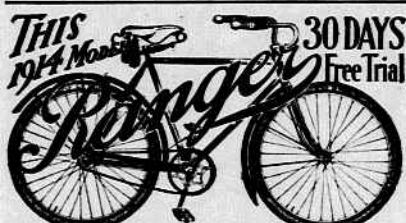
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all sorts and conditions of it to his present peaceful state.

"Kittibudget, what the deuce is all this about? You've been crying!"

"Supposing I have?" came muffled from the pillows.

"What have you been doing to Thomas?"

"I?" she shot back, sitting up, her eyes blazing. "He kissed me, Dad, as he probably kisses his English barmaids!"

"Kitty girl, you're as pretty as a primrose. I don't think Thomas was really accountable."

"Are you defending him?" blankly.

"No. The strange part of it is, I don't think Thomas wants to be defended. A few minutes ago he came to me and told me what he had done. He is leaving."

The anger went out of her eyes, snuff-candle wise. "Leaving?"

"Leaving. He asked me for the motor to the station."

"Leaving! Well, that's about the only possible thing he could do, under the circumstances. He has a good excuse." Excuse! Kitty's nimble mind reached out and touched Thomas's Machiavellian inspiration.

"Hang it, Kitty, I had to run out into the lilacs to laugh! Can't this be smoothed over some way? I like that boy. I don't care if he is a Britisher and sometimes as simple as a fool. When I think of the other light-headed duffers who call themselves gentlemen—Pah! They drink my whiskies, smoke my cigars, and dub me an old Mick behind my back. They run around with silly chorus girls, and play poker till sunup, and never do an honest day's work. It takes a brave man to come to me and frankly say that he has insulted my daughter."

"He said that?" Behind her lips Kitty was already smiling. "You are acting very strangely, Dad."

"I know. Ordinarily I'd have taken him by the collar and hustled him into the road. And if it had been one of those young bachelors who are coming down tonight, I'd have done it. I like Thomas; and I don't think he kissed you either to affront or to insult you."

"Indeed!" icily.

"I dare say I stole a kiss or two in my day."

"Does Mother know it?"

"Back in the old country, when I was a lad. It's a normal impulse. There ain't a young man alive who can look upon a pretty girl's face without wishing to kiss it. I don't believe Thomas will repeat the offense. The trouble, Girl, is this: You've been living in a false atmosphere, where people hide all their generous impulses because to be natural is not fashionable."

"I marvel at you more and more. Is it generous, then, to kiss a girl without so much as by your leave? If he had been sorry, if he had apologized, I might overlook the deed. But he kissed me and walked away. Do you realize what such an action means to any young woman with pride? Very well. If he apologizes, he may stay; but no longer on the basis of friendship. It must be purely business. When my guests arrive I shall not consider it necessary to ask him to join any of our amusements."

"Poor devil! He'll have to pay for that kiss."

"Next I suppose you'll be wanting me to marry him!" Kitty volleyed. But she wasn't half so angry as she pretended.

"What! Thomas?"

"Ah, that's different, isn't it? There, there! I've promised to overlook the offense on condition that he apologize and keep his place. I have always said that you'd rather have a man about than me."

"Well, perhaps I could understand a man better."

"Go down to breakfast. I hear Mother moving about. I'll ring for what I need. I must bathe and dress. Some of the people will motor in for lunch."

KILLIGREW, subdued and mystified, went in search of Thomas, and discovered him in almost the exact spot he had left him; for Thomas, having breakfasted, had returned to the living room to await the motor.

"Thomas, when Kitty comes down, apologize. And remember this, you can't kiss a pretty girl just because you happen to want to."

"But, Mr. Killigrew, I didn't want to!" said Thomas.

"Well, I'll be tinker—damned!"

"I mean—really, Sir, it is better that I should return at once to the city. I'm a rotter."

"Don't be a fool! Take your grips to your room, and don't let's have any more nonsense. Finish up that report from Brazil; and if you handle it right, I'll take you into

the office, where you'll be away from the women folks."

Thomas's heart went down in despair.

"Mrs. Killigrew can find another secretary for the bureau. I sha'n't say a word to her, and I'll see that Kitty doesn't. You've had your breakfast. Go and finish up that report. Williams." Killigrew called to the second man, "take Mr. Webb's grips to his rooms. I'll see you later, Thomas."

And Killigrew made off for the breakfast room, where he chuckled at odd times, much to his wife's curiosity. But he shook his head when she quizzed him.

"You agree with me, Molly, don't you, that Kitty shall marry when and where she pleases?"

"Certainly, Daniel. I don't believe in ready-made matches."

"No more do I. Molly, old girl, I've slathers of money. I could quit now; but I'm healthy and can't play all day. Got to work some of the time. Everyone around here shall do as they please. And," slyly, "if Kitty should want to marry Thomas—"

"Thomas!"

"Anything against the idea?"

"But Thomas couldn't take care of Kitty."

"H'm!"

"And Kitty wouldn't marry a man who couldn't."

"Some truth in that. At present Thomas couldn't support an idea. But there's makings in the boy, give a man time and nothing else to do. There's one thing, though: Thomas seems to have the gift of picking out the chaff when it comes to men. A man who can spot a man is worth something to somebody. Where Thomas's niche is, however, I can't tell to date. He'll never get on socially: he has too much regard for other people's feelings."

"And no tact."

"A poor man needs a good deal of that." Killigrew began paring his fourth chop bone. He hadn't enjoyed himself so much in months. Thomas had kissed Kitty and hadn't wanted to!

It would take a philosopher to dig up the reason for that; or rather a clairvoyant, since philosophers dealt only with logical sequences, and there was nothing logical to Killigrew's mind in Thomas's kissing Kitty when he hadn't wanted to.

To be continued next Sunday

CURIOUS LAND TENURES

OUR British cousins still cling to some curious customs with respect to land tenures. Whenever, for instance, a certain estate at Chingford, in Essex, passes into new hands, the owner, with his wife, man servant, and maid servant, goes on horseback to the parsonage and pays homage by blowing three blasts on a horn. He carries a hawk on his wrist, and his servant leads a greyhound, both supposed to be for the use of the rector that day.

The new owner then receives a chicken for the hawk, a peck of oats for his horse, and a loaf of bread for his greyhound. After dinner the owner blows three more blasts, and then with his party withdraws from the rectory.

Another curious proceeding is known as "The Castor Whip Tenure." On Palm Sunday every year a servant from the Brough-ton estate attends service at Castor Church with a new cart whip, and, after cracking it three times on the porch, marches with it to the manor house.

As the clergyman begins to deliver his sermon the servant quits his seat. A purse containing thirty pieces of silver is fixed at the end of the whiplash, and, kneeling on a cushion he holds the purse suspended over the head of the minister until the end of the sermon. Then purse and whip are left at the manor house.

The "Whisper Court" at Rochford, in Essex, is a strange Michaelmas observance held under the auspices of the steward of the manor. The business of the court is transacted at midnight in the open air. The absence of a tenant is punishable by a fine of double his rent for each hour he fails to be in attendance; no artificial light except a fire-brand is permitted; the proceedings are recorded by means of one of the embers of the brand. The roll of fourteen tenants is called and answered in a whisper, and then all kneel and swear allegiance.

In explanation of this odd ceremony it is said that many years ago the lord of the manor, after an absence from his estate, was returning home at night. Passing over what is known as Kings Hill, he accidentally heard some of his discontented tenantry plotting his assassination, and, thus warned, reached home by an unexpected route. He enacted that from that time forth the tenants on his estate should assemble every year exactly at the same time to do him homage round a post which he caused to be erected on the precise spot where the plotters met.